

Love and Liminality: Understanding College as a Liminal Phase in Regards to Romantic

Love and Courtship

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Abstract

Twelve students at the University of Texas at Austin have been interviewed in an attempt to understand romantic love and courtship on the college campus. Romantic love and courtship on UT campus are best understood through the conceptualization of college as a liminal period. Students are expressing liminality in their ambiguous and unstructured behaviors and perceptions of courtship, and their rendition of romantic love as irreconcilable on the college campus. Romantic love is thus conceptualized as the ‘structured result’ of ‘the activity which has no structure’ that is college courtship. It is through this activity with no structure that students learn and perpetuate their ideal romantic love that they will seek out after the liminal period, that ultimately structures them into marriage and family units.

Introduction

“University Love is very different [than regular romantic love] because” ... “like yeah you’re spending four years here but you don’t know what’s going to happen after those four years” ... “it’s nearly stupid to think to find something that’s that stable because everyone is in a transitory phase.”

- Rose

Rose is a fourth-year student at The University of Texas at Austin, describing to me what romantic love and courtship look like on the college campus. This quote embodies the attitude students are taking towards love in college—that it is somehow different than the more ‘stable’ love they should encounter after they leave college. Attending university is a pivotal time in a person’s life and they are experiencing a much different life than they were while at home with their parents. They are in a completely new environment away from home, experiencing more freedom, taking in an abundance of new information, meeting a lot of new people and exploring themselves—including their sexuality. Many of my respondents referred to this time in their life as a significant one of exploration and transition. In addition, students are trying to figure out how they will go about building their career of choice. A lot of times, they do not know what they want that career to be or how they will go about building it yet, so a lot of energy is put towards figuring it out. Being at the university itself takes a lot of energy, as students are negotiating their time between classes, homework, extracurricular activities, jobs, as well as social interactions. The students’ perceptions of this time in their life greatly affects how they perceive and practice romantic love.

The social climate of the university also weighs on the students’ behaviors in romantic love. Scholars often describe western culture as an “individualistic” (Hatfield and Rapson 2005) culture, meaning they value individuality, uniqueness, independence, personal happiness, reduction of pain, and personal and artistic freedom. These ideas have proliferated into the realm

of romantic love and courtship as high values have begun to be placed on passionate love, marriage for love, egalitarian families, sexual permissiveness, and sexual freedom for men and women. (Hatfield and Rapson 2005). The University of Texas is located about one mile from the Texas State Capitol in Austin, which is often referred to as a particularly liberal city compared to the rest of Texas, notably when it comes to sexuality. Values of individuality, personal happiness, and sexual freedom are especially felt in this city, and the anecdotes given by my respondents reflect these values as well.

The purpose of this study among students at The University of Texas at Austin is to analyze in what ways students are perceiving and practicing romantic love on a college campus. I ask what is romantic love and courtship to the UT students? And how are traditional gender roles being reproduced by UT students? In this paper I will argue that students' perceptions of romantic love and their behaviors in courtship are reflective of college as a liminal period.

I use the term liminality in reference to multiple works by Victor Turner. Liminality is usually used in the context of ritual rites of passage, as the 'in between' phase in transitioning from one status to another, such as a boy becoming a man. The liminal subject is stripped of his previous social status (boy), inducted into the liminal period, and then reassimilated into society with a newfound status (man). Turner defines liminality as "the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (1967:95). During the liminal period, the classification of the liminal subject is ambiguous because they are perceived as being between structural classifications of society. It is a "realm of pure possibility" because in an unstructured realm, the rules of structure do not apply (Turner 1967). Yet, it is a "source" of "structural assertions" (Turner 1967:95) because it is a period of reflection in which the

subjects undergo an ontological transformation that allows them to be reassimilated into society with their newfound structural status. When students are attending university, they are ‘stripped’ of their status as adolescents and inducted into a liminal period and space away from home with other liminal individuals on the college campus. When they leave college, they are assimilated into society as an adult ready to build a career as well as a romantic relationship.

Conceptualizing college through liminality allows us to understand the perceptions and behaviors students are expressing, especially when it comes to romantic love and courtship.

Romantic love is often defined as a relatively new innovation emerging from Western culture. According to Beigel (1951), romantic love is a derivative of courtly love that developed in an attempt to save monogamous marriage from radical social change due to industrialization. Wolkomir has a more modern, but similar argument claiming that romantic love for marriage emerged from courtly love as the “central organizing institution in society” that perpetuates “hegemonic heteronormativity” (2009). By this she means that romantic love emerged historically as a way to legitimize and sustain the gendered division of labor that is maintained today in traditional gender roles in courtship and marriage. Thus, romantic love necessarily structures society into gendered family units.

However, when students are engaging in romantic love and courtship on campus, that is in the liminal period, they are not being structured in this way. Rather, given that they are residing in an unstructured realm (Turner 1967), the students are exemplifying a condition of reflection on love and courtship practices. From this reflection, the students in my sample recognize that their ideal romantic love is irreconcilable in the liminal period due primarily to the demands of college. By the ‘ideal’ love I mean that this is the love the students envision to have with somebody that constitutes them getting married or starting to build their life together. The

ideal love was most notably characterized by a reciprocation of invested time and energy into the relationship in conjunction with a strong emotional and physical connection. Romantic love is supposed to be stable in the eyes of UT students, it is usually not thought of as something they will find on a college campus. Most students even claimed that they just did not have the time or energy to invest in a stable, romantically involved relationship because of college course work and uncertainty in where their careers will take them. When they leave the liminal period, the students, now adults, have reflected enough to perpetuate the ‘source’ of the ‘structural assertion’ that is romantic love in the ideal way that they intend for marriage. After the liminal phase, they are prepared to find and participate adequately in a romantic love that will ultimately (or at least ideally) lead to marriage.

The “realm of pure possibility” (Turner 1967: 95) that is a condition of reflection is further evident in the behaviors of students in courtship practices. Courtship is defined very broadly by my sample as “getting to know someone,” which can be done in a multitude of ways. Characteristic of the modern era of courtship is the tendency of many college students to use dating apps like Tinder. Tinder is a location-based social app that allows users from the same area to like or dislike another person’s profile. If both parties ‘like’ the other one, a match is created and the users can chat. Another similar app is one called Grindr that is essentially the same thing as Tinder but for the queer community. These apps provide students with an unlimited amount of available partners at an accelerated rate (Ansari and Klinenberg 2015). This does have its affects on the courtship scene, mainly as a way to meet and get to know multiple people at once and accelerate the courtship process. Often times the courtship process leads nowhere, to just a hook up, or even to a hook up that later evolves into a romantic relationship. “Hooking up” has been described by previous studies as a new phenomenon that threatens to

replace traditional dating and courtship (England and Thomas 2006). However, UT students conceptualize hooking up as part of courtship and a behavior that is bound to happen on a college campus with such a close proximity of sexually available partners. After all, many students use this liminal period on a college campus to explore their sexualities. Courtship on campus is ‘unstructured’ because students are not engaging in courtship with the intention of fulfilling their ideal love, rather they are exploring and reflecting on those practices. It is through this unstructured process of courtship on a college campus that students are learning how to go about their ideal romantic love and what they expect from a romantic relationship. Thus, I argue that the ideal romantic love students are describing is, in the words of Sartre and Turner, the “structured result” of the “activity which has no structure” that is courtship on the UT campus.

Because romantic love is thought to contribute to structuring society into gendered roles, I examine how traditional gender roles are being reproduced by UT students. Turner states “sex distinctions are important components of structural status” (1967:96). Studies such as those by Wolkomir as well as Ickes show that men and women are socialized to enact certain roles based on societal expectations of masculinity and femininity. A woman is expected to perform the role of nurturer; she embodies caring, affection, devotion and gentleness (Ickes 1993). She behaves ‘reluctantly’ to the overt gestures of male attention (Buss 1988). On the other hand, men are expected to be ‘providers’ who embody strength and a social orientation emphasizing power and status (Ickes 1993). They are perceived as the ‘initiators’ of the courtship process (Buss 1988). These are the “traditional gender role orientations” that “society prescribes and encourages” because they promote “the effective socialization and social integration of its members” (Ickes 1993: 72). Furthermore, Judith Butler recognizes gender as a continuously enacted performance that constitutes identities of masculinity and femininity in society (1990). In the unstructured

realm of courtship at UT, students in my sample are reflecting on these gender performances and even enacting roles that are not traditionally within their gendered identities. Many students interviewed are comfortable with performing more ambiguous, egalitarian roles in courtship, more prominently the women in my sample than the men. The students exemplify Turner's notion that "in a structureless realm [structural statuses] do not apply" (1967: 96). The perceptions and behaviors of students at UT in romantic love and courtship altogether illuminate college as a liminal period in that it is "a phase in social life in which this confrontation between 'activity which has no structure' and its 'structured results' produces in men their highest pitch of self-consciousness" (Turner 1974: 255).

Methods

As part of my ethnographic research, I have conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with students attending UT. I have reached out to peers in my classes directly, provided that they might be more willing to share this kind of information with me than a complete stranger would. I also engaged in some snowball sampling in which the peers that I approached recruited study subjects from among their peers that are willing to participate. Of the sample, six were male and six were female. The students were of different cultural backgrounds including Hispanic, South Asian, and European among others. Two of the students identified as homosexual, the rest as heterosexual. With participant's consent, all interviews conducted were voice recorded. Provided below are some of the kinds of questions I asked students:

What is romantic love to you? How would you define it or describe it? What are some characteristics of it?

Have you ever been 'in love?' If so, what was it like? What kind of feelings, emotions or behaviors do you associate with romantic love?

How do you put romantic love into practice? In other words, how do you show or display acts of romantic love? Could you walk me through what you might think is an ideal display of romantic love, such as a 'dream date'?

In courtship practices, do you think there are any gender roles present? Could you give some examples of them?

In your opinion, are courtship and dating practices characteristic of romantic love? What role do you think they play in displaying acts of love? Do you think they are necessary practices in determining or showcasing love for another person?

What role does sex play in the display or practice of romantic love? How do you think love, marriage and sex interact with each other?

What does 'hook-up culture' mean to you? Do you think 'hook-up culture' is prevalent among students at UT? How might hook-up culture speak to your ideas about romantic love and sex?

In what ways do you think your social/cultural surroundings have an effect on your perceptions of romantic love? Are there any external or internal pressures you feel to think or act a certain way when it comes to romantic love and putting it into practice? Explain.

I have based my interviews around these questions but depending on the answers of the students some questions were edited and added during the development of the interview, revealing the semi-structured nature of my interviews. I will present my findings from these interviews mostly through direct block quotations and analysis to provide an understanding of how UT students perceive and practice romantic love. All names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the identity of my respondents.

It is important to note that my population of study is a pretty diverse one, and the cultural backgrounds of the students may play a big part in how they individually perceive and practice

romantic love. It is very likely that I will see differences in perceptions and practices across different races and genders in my study sample. However, my sample is too small to readily generate an overall conclusiveness about differences in love practices across races and cultures. Thus, the analysis I provide from these interviews will be an interpretive one that discusses differences only when they are relevant to my argument. As for gender differences, it is imperative to my argument to discuss the prevalence (or non-prevalence) of gender normative practices of courtship among the population of study. I primarily explain how the students are perceiving these gender role practices as well as how they say they are reproducing and/or opposing those same roles.

Defining Love

At its very base, love is an emotion. This paper focuses on romantic love, which is usually defined as the passionate, fleeting love and strong desire for another person (Hatfield and Rapson 2005, Fisher 2002). However, the topic of romantic love proved to be a difficult one for UT students to really pigeon hole. Everybody's definition of romantic love varied in different ways, but I will discuss common themes first. When asked "What does romantic love mean to you?" some main themes given by the students were a deep or special sort of connection, caring for the other person as you would yourself or over others, and an overwhelming feeling sometimes associated with anxiety. All students interviewed suggested that love was a feeling, and most mentioned that it involved a physical component as well as the emotional one.

A white female student in a committed relationship, Belle, gave an abundance of love acts centered around caring for another individual:

“you care about that person and they also care about you” ... it’s a mutual support that gives you emotional loving, physical and emotional loving.” ... “being considerate of somebody else, worrying about somebody like you would worry about yourself, you want to help them through everything” ... “physical comfort, romantic love always has a physical connection between two people” ... “anxiety, like in anticipating that I’m going to see him or we’re going to go do something together, it makes me really anxious and really excited about spending time with him” ... “sadness or empathy in it too, feeling what he is feeling or trying to make him feel better when he’s upset, feeling happiness, feeling okay with whatever is going on in the world because they are there.” ... “if you really care about somebody you want to be near them, it takes work from both sides equally” ... “lust there’s a lot less commitment when things get hard, like in romantic love versus lust you’re making that commitment to be with that person even when things get hard and not just because you’re enjoying it”

What intrigued me here was that Belle’s rendition of romantic love pays particular attention to requited love and the effort put into the relationship by both partners. She suggests that in order for the feeling of love to be validated, it needs to include caring and ‘mutual support’ from all parties involved, both emotionally and physically. Love takes ‘work,’ in other words time and energy. While she discusses the usual positive emotions associated with love like happiness and comfort, Belle points out that love is not always as pleasant as people often like to think. However, she is able to look past unpleasant experiences in her own relationship because she is in love. This emphasizes the kinds of behaviors that authenticate romantic love. To Belle and other students, a truly sophisticated love demonstrates a deep emotional connection, physical intimacy, commitment, and especially time and emotional investment from both partners into the relationship. This is the ideal romantic love that for students constitutes the consideration of marriage.

Notice also that Belle associates feelings of anxiety with love. While her anecdote represents the more exciting and restless kind of anxiety of seeing and being with her beloved, other UT students perceive this anxiety negatively. One student in particular, identifying as a

Hispanic homosexual male, constructed a skeptical account of their experience with romantic love. Theo defined romantic love quite literally as:

“a biological process which takes place in the brain, which compels individuals to breed with one another.” ... “Have I ever been in love? I don’t know if I have... [it feels like] being light-headed, or like you have someone smashing your chest with a sledgehammer” ... “I don’t really care about falling in love, I’m sure at some point I’ll probably fall in love, I don’t know, I don’t actively pursue relationships” ... “I don’t have time to fall in love, it’s too consuming, I recognize that in order to have like a successful relationship that’s healthy, you need to actually put time and effort into it and I’m not willing to put the time and effort into that because I have greater priorities.” ... “if you truly love [someone] their cares, concerns, opinions and ideas need to take a place in your heart and in your mind, and it can’t just be one person doing this it has to be both of them. And then the [lovers] need to be able to compromise” ... “honesty is really important” ... “sparks die, the feeling of intense attraction and infatuation fades” ... “be aware of your persons shortcomings, recognize their faults and be willing to accept them” ... “If I can’t see myself living with this person for the rest of my life, even though we might have like 4 good years together, I don’t really see the point.”

Theo’s anecdote strikingly stands out among others due to his pessimistic conceptualization of love. About 4 of the students interviewed made mention of certain feelings of anxiety when in love, but none to the extent of getting your chest smashed with a sledgehammer. On the other hand, Theo questioned if he ever even was in love, so perhaps so far, every experience he has had with love has been in some ways painful or unpleasant. He also gave an account of his parents being a prime example of what he did not want from love or a relationship. Thus, it seemed to me that his experience of his parents’ relationships also probably contributed to his disdain towards love. Nevertheless, Theo has some enticing view points on how the ideal love should look. Again, we see the notion that love should involve active effort from both people involved. If only one person puts in the effort, it is not a ‘healthy’ relationship. Another parallel to other interviews, is the idea that ‘intense attraction’ and ‘infatuation’ is fleeting. It may be present more notably at the beginning of the relationship, but as Theo says, it fades and there needs to be something else that holds the loving bond between two people. For

Theo, and many other students like him, this means being able to compromise and love someone despite their shortcomings.

For Theo and most students interviewed, ‘healthy’ relationships like these require a lot of time and energy that at least half of my sample said they just do not presently have. Notice Theo mentions he has ‘greater priorities’ than worrying about putting enough time and effort into a relationship. By greater priorities he is referring to the demands of his college career, and most students can agree college can be overwhelming. Thus, the environment of college itself has an effect on the way students are conceptualizing romantic love and courtship in their lives. College students do not associate a stable romantic love with the college campus because their limited time and energy do not allow for it. The ideal romantic love will come for Theo “at some point,” presumably after the liminal period of college.

Another student, identifying as a homosexual Hispanic male named DJ, regarded himself as a “hopeless romantic.” Despite his excitement towards romantic love, he also mentions the pressures of pursuing a college career while pursuing a romantic relationship.

“ [romantic love is] a deep connection that just kind of makes you feel complete with somebody, it can be final or fleeting” ... “deep connection that you share with somebody and you guys want to see each other grow, like you want to see each other grow and be happy whether it’s with or without you, both of you are there for the betterment of each other”... “it almost is transactional, like immediate gratification but I know that’s not romantic love that’s just like lust, but yeah I guess romantic love is just wanting to build a story together and see the betterment.” ... “all I wanted to do was hear about him and his story and build mine together with his”... “no really concept of time, we would stay up all night” ... “definitely a honeymoon phase of love like you want to just be together all the time” ... “kind of seeing what life would be like being in a house with him, like building a life together” ... “I realized there was a more feeling of love because we started having differences and contrasting feelings about things but we saw it as I guess a compromise” ... “love turned into a distraction of like I always want to be with you and I’m always thinking about you or if I’m doing something and I see your name on my phone pop up in a text I’m going to like stop everything for it, and so love became a nuisance, but he became the desired thing I always wanted to be with; the emotion of

love wasn't desirable but he was"... "love was something that both of us had to put a lot of investment into, it was taking a lot more work than we were willing to put in"

The narrative of love as a deep connection is very clear here. I appreciate that his narrative shows how his feelings of love changed over the course of the relationship. There was the really passionate, honeymoon phase of love where all he wanted to do was be with his beloved and he would picture building a future together. He knew he was really in love though when him and his partner were able to compromise in the face of disagreement. Compromising seems to be of great importance when it comes to relationships for most of the students interviewed. Compromise after the initial passionate phase, not only validates being in love but also holds the relationship together. When a couple can no longer compromise, the relationship will likely end. Akin to compromising is also putting in the effort to be in a loving relationship. Continuously we see that UT students find relationships time-consuming or that it requires some type of work, and that the work they put in must be reciprocated in order to secure a good relationship. DJ and his partner's relationship ended when they were no longer willing to invest time and energy into the relationship. Thus, UT students put a lot of thought into the ability to compromise and invest time before entering into loving relationships. It is not enough to just be in love with someone for the relationship to be a successful one in their minds.

What really stuck out to me in this interview in particular was his notion that "the emotion of love wasn't desirable, but he was." He is pertaining to the anxieties that arose while being in a loving relationship. He would stop whatever he was doing to attend to his beloved, even sometimes at the expense of what he was doing or what he needed to do. He felt like he often had to choose between tending to his lover and tending to his other responsibilities. He even provided an anecdote of feeling like he had to choose between doing his college assignments or talking to his beloved because doing both at the same time was not efficient. At

the same time, his anxiety stemmed from always wanting to be with his lover or always being concerned about his lover. The way DJ describes his feelings, it is evident that love is overwhelming and at times a nuisance, especially when placed in a transitional environment that demands a lot from students already. The ideal love is irreconcilable with the college campus.

I placed these particular interviews in conjunction with each other because they exemplify differences in the way students are acknowledging and responding to love in their lives. Simultaneously, these interviews give us a general view of how romantic love is conceptualized to UT students. Romantic love is an emotion that involves a deep emotional connection in conjunction with a physical connection, commitment to a person, and especially required time and energy investment into the relationship. While their experiences in love varied significantly, they all have a similar notion of what an ideal romantic loving relationship should look like, which is one that should lead to a marriage thus contributing to structuring society. To UT students, the ideal romantic relationship also requires ‘work’ that is invested by both partners. This work generally refers to time spent with the partner and energy spent on emotionally devoting to another person’s cares and concerns as if your own. However, this ideal romantic love is disrupted in the liminal phase by ‘greater priorities’ such as the time and energy investment demands of a college career. As we compare these quotes with the opening quote by Rose, it is evident that college students recognize they are in a period of transitioning and great demands to prepare themselves for the career world. Thus, they are especially reluctant to engage in an ideal romantic relationship because they do not feel ready to properly contribute to the ideal love in a way that leads to marriage. The learning and preparation of participation in structuring love then, is anticipated by the anti-structure of courtship on UT’s campus.

Defining Courtship

Along with romantic love, I asked UT students what does courtship mean to them. All of the students interviewed used the phrase “getting to know someone” in their definition of courtship. Previous studies on courtship typically refer to courtship in the traditional sense as a man ‘courting’ a woman or taking her out on traditional dates in public spheres (England and Thomas 2006), which then leads to a relationship and then ultimately marriage and reproduction (Buss 1988). At the University of Texas however, courtship is not at all structured in this way. Marriage and reproduction are not at the forefront of courtship for UT students, and traditional dates are not the only way of engaging with or showing interest in another person.

Theo presents us with a short and to the point rendition of what courtship looks like today,

“It’s the process of getting to know one another to see if you’re interested in them more than just physically, but also personally and emotionally, you need to see if they’re compatible with you in that regard, that’s dating and courtship. Because like in order to fall in love with someone first you need to actually be like physically attracted them, so I feel like courtship would be the next step, like okay I’m attracted to you physically now I need to see if your beliefs or attitudes and just the way that you act as a person is compatible with the way I act as a person, doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re the same just that you can deal with each other.”

Theo presents the fundamental definition of courtship put forth by all of the students. Courtship is a process of getting to know someone after they have already established that they are physically attracted to that person. The purpose of this is to see if you are attracted to that person emotionally as well, and this is indeed necessary to further the relationship and ultimately fall in love. Theo’s idea of falling in love through courtship is having compatible beliefs or attitudes and being able to ‘deal’ with each other. We begin to see his pessimistic view of love emerge here, but by ‘dealing’ with each other he is referring more generally to being able to accept a person for who they are. Courtship allows him to decide if this person is compatible

enough with his own personality for him to be able to deal with the things that are not so pleasant.

DJ is quite the opposite of Theo when it comes to expressing romantic love. DJ's account is highly romanticized,

“When I flirt with somebody” ... “I’ll go out of my way to talk to him or text him, or walk him like partially way to his class as if it’s in my way but it’s like not” ... “because like I want to spend time with somebody and I want to really get to know you on a personal level. So it’s mostly like getting that quality time and building this narrative, this story around you and seeing if I want to get that story like more full I guess” ... “I 100% yes [think that courtship is necessary]. I still am a hopeless romantic, and I love to show my appreciation to others by like planning cute romantic dates, or doing things that I know they like. And so for me my ideal relationship would be like I meet somebody naturally, not through Grindr not through tinder, and we like see where it goes and like build it up from there, but I don’t know if I believe that’s a reality anymore, especially in like the queer community because like with Grindr you talk to somebody and the first thing they want is like to sleep with you and whatever and then after that is when you can start being friends and talking to each other it’s almost like a gateway is how it works in the queer community. And so my faith for cute romantic ideas is kind of going down, at this point in my life there’s so much change going I don’t know if I even care about that anymore” ... “I definitely think that if somebody wants to date me they at least need to put some kind of effort into it, either exceeding or equally to what I’m putting in.”

DJ favors the idea of going out on traditional dates and spending time doing things that he knows his beloved likes to do. However, his first thoughts that came to mind when it came to courtship were acts of him ‘going out of his way’ to show interest in another person. He places a lot of emphasis on spending quality time with his beloved. DJ’s ideal process of courtship is more traditional in the sense that he does not want to meet someone through dating apps but ‘normally’ through face to face interaction that ‘builds’ into a more emotionally involved relationship. Once again, we get the notion that his ideal sense of a courtship that leads to romantic love is incompatible with “this point in his life” because of his liminal status of transitioning. I find especially interesting his reference to hook up culture as it is prevalent in the queer community. He feels as though in the queer community the only way to start to build a

romantic relationship is to sleep with someone first, and that is not how he wants to build a true romantic relationship. This is reflective of DJ's personal confrontation between structure and anti-structure. Through the anti-structure of college courtship, including hookups, DJ is able to formulate the ideal love he will seek once past the liminal period of transition.

Lily, a heterosexual female, presented a definition of courtship that is indubitably analogous to Theo's.

"courtship is when you're just trying to get to know someone" ... "like I guess you're into them and they're into you at first but you still don't know much about them so you kind of try to set up dates to see if you guys are a good fit" ... "I guess my experience was we met on tinder" ... "so I wasn't looking for a hook up, I found out later that he was, but whatever so but yeah the first few times we were just going on dates like there wasn't any pretense that we were going to have sex early or anything it was just kind of like meeting and it was really cute" ... "if you already know the person, if they're like your friend, so you already know them no [courtship is not necessary] but" ... "I think it is important because I mean eventually you're going to have to, like how can you be in love with someone you don't know. So any sense of, it doesn't have to be dates per se, but like any sense of like getting to know each other and spending time like initial stage of the relationship I'd say would be courtship it's just like a given"

Courtship is clearly a process by which two people who are 'interested' in each other (physically attracted to one another) get to know each other better and see if they would get along in a romantic relationship well. Courtship does not always have to entail going out on traditional dates, and sometimes the process is accelerated when the couple were friends or knew each other well before deciding to pursue a relationship. Lily's anecdote stood out because her experience of courtship was through Tinder, which is usually associated with hook up culture, discussed in a later section. She even mentions that her partner was initially looking for just a hook up, but they ended up going on dates with no preconceived notion of sex being involved. So, Tinder can be used as a gateway tool for easily meeting people and forming all kinds of relationships, not just hook ups. Apps like Tinder are often times agents of the courtship process itself as students message and get to know each other through online personalities before meeting

in person. What happens after that determines if the courting was successful or not. The courtship process is necessary because as Lily claims, you cannot be in love with somebody you do not know. She does broaden the definition of courtship from a process of going on dates to anything that involved getting to know someone and/or spending time with them at the initial stage of pursuing a romantic relationship. This reveals courtship at UT as an unstructured “realm of pure possibility” (Turner 1967: 95) and condition of reflection in that often times students do not have intentions of pursuing the ideal love, they do not know where a courtship will lead once it has started, and it rarely leads to the ideal love but allows students to reflect on what to expect from the ideal love.

This last anecdote on courtship is a rather lengthy one from Klay, as he had the most to say about courtship. Klay is a heterosexual male and the oldest in my sample of UT students. His discussion is a generalized model for how all students go about courtship on a college campus.

“[courtship] is a process to get to know someone so you can make an educated decision on do you want create a relationship or advance it or update it or scale it back, maybe you go on a date with someone who you think they are not as cool as you thought they were maybe we should just be acquaintances that talk once a year maybe that’s the best fit for us” ... “some doors are opened some doors are closed” ... “what a date would look like, sometimes it literally is Netflix and chill where you have conversation and you don’t even pay attention to what’s on, or in my days on Tinder I’ve come up with some really elaborate really creative date ideas all kinds of stuff and those were no more successful than any others” ... “what you do on the date is secondary to how you treat the people on the date” ... “if she’s cool go on a second date.. the more traits I see that exist in this person when we are in this relationship that exist in this contract that I see happening and that I want to be a part of, then that’s how I approach finding romantic love” ... “it’s a try it’s an attempt and sometimes you do bad on them.” ... “so when you say courtship practices I think of the processes or mechanisms by which people our age at UT meet, date, etc.” ... “courtship is from the first overture of sending a Facebook message if they leave it on read whatever if it ends up in a marriage that’s cool, it’s still like every little interaction you have with someone you may consider forming a relationship whether it’s a coworker, friends, mentors, whatever, lovers, who cares, that’s part of courtship too. It is the process of getting to know someone-- It is the spine of romantic love” ... “you can’t have romantic love without the courtship, without the process.”

Thus, courtship is very broadly defined. Students do not place strict boundaries on courtship or dates, nor do they place limitation on where the relationship will go until after they have interacted with the person enough to decide. As Klay describes it, as he gets to know someone further the clearer this decision becomes. As he learns more traits about this person that are compatible with him and he sees himself being romantically involved with them, that is him falling in love. It is evident that the courtship sequence starts with a physical attraction or interest in another person. Students seem to know when they are initially attracted to someone, but they do not put much thought into where this relationship will lead. It is not until they engage with this person, usually the inaugural conversation or even the first date, that they can make a decision on wanting to further the relationship or not. If this interaction goes well, they will continue to spend time with each other, learning more about each other, and deciding if they would work well together in a romantic relationship. For example, in the case of Lily when she met her partner on Tinder. He was initially looking for a purely physical relationship, but as he got to know her further his intentions changed to pursuing a romantically involved relationship with her. The idea of the traditional date is not central to courtship anymore in the minds of UT students, as there are new ways to interact with their peers. The initial interaction that sparks the process can lead to romantic relationships, hook ups, just friendships, or even nowhere. The initial interaction could even be a hookup or a friendship that then leads to a romantic relationship. As DJ put it, in the modern age at UT, “love can start from anywhere, and it can end anywhere.”

Klay most notably alludes to the changing ‘landscape’ of courtship.

“I think the landscape that courtship lives in now is different because of the methods or mechanism like-- one I slid in a girls dm’s I literally just sent her a picture of a dog from Zilker Park and she didn’t respond, and I was like ‘heard’ that was my courtship attempt,

[it has been] seen, you left me on read, moving right along, gotcha” ... “the methods of courtship now” ... “now you can literally go on [someone’s] Facebook and know pretty much their social resume, who they dated, how long they were with them, are they in school, rather than asking them.” ... “It provides shortcuts, sometimes that is helpful, it is efficient; for every girl I know it is really efficient to know for sure [if] a lot of guys are just using you for Tinder [to hook up] because they have like a thousand matches of guys saying ‘hey,’ ‘hi,’ ‘what’s up’” ... “that’s just one little step in the process that’s really easy now. Actually getting to know someone is still the work of it that’s still really hard.” ... “Tinder has changed dating irreversibly now.”

Klay places heavy emphasis on the role of social media and dating apps as “short-cuts” in the courtship process. He is not alone, as all of the students interviewed at least mentioned Tinder and most had at least used it once. Tinder seems to be a new way that students are meeting and interacting, and students are using social media to find out more about a person before even going on a date. Particularly interesting is his reference of online personas as ‘social resumes.’ This is analogous to Ansari and Klinenberg’s concept of a person’s online personality being different than their actual person (2015). Social media allows students to find out information about a person, reducing time and energy put forth in courting, but only to the extent of their online persona. Klay suggests the information gathered has mostly to do with how that person has interacted with other people online. “Actually getting to know” them is the challenge the courtship overcomes. By this he is referring to knowing somebody beyond the arbitrary level and beyond their online personas.

Klay’s anecdote sums up all of the ways in which students are engaging in courtship. Courtship is broadly defined by all UT students, and it is important to note that courtship involves anything from just starting a conversation, to dates, to hooking up, to beginning a romantic relationship and everything in between. Thus, I urge the reader to juxtapose how students are articulating love versus how they articulate courtship. There is an ideal romantic love, but not so much an ideal courtship process. Whereas an ideal romantic love contributes to

structuring a society into marriage and family units, the courtship process among college students is very much the antithesis to structural family units. Many of the students do not associate an ideal romantic love with college courtship, since the demands of college life make it hard to invest energy and time into relationships. The rise of technology and dating apps aids in allowing students to allocate their time and energy towards multiple courtships at one time, or providing short cuts in the courtship process. As Klay indicates though, most courtship attempts are not successful or only lead to temporary relationships.

That students are engaging in courtship processes that oppose the nature of required time and energy investment of their ideal romantic love reflects their “confrontation” with the “activity which has no structure” and the “structured results” (Turner 1974:255). The ideal love that students will pursue represents the ‘structured results’ of courtship on the college campus which is ‘activity which has no structure.’ College campuses like UT especially contribute to the liminal status of students in this way because not only are they engaging in an unstructured realm of courtship, but students are able to recognize their transitory status while on campus. They consistently make reference to “this point in their lives” being one in which the ideal structured love is inconceivable. This is directly reflective of the students’ “highest pitch of self-consciousness” (Turner 1974: 255) because through participating in courtship in conjunction with their perceptions of the ideal love, students realize they are ill-prepared to contribute properly to the romantic love that will ultimately structure them into marriage and family units. It is then through this unstructured “realm of pure possibility” (Turner 1967: 95) of courtship on a college campus that students are learning of and preparing themselves for the ideal love they will seek after leaving the liminal period that is college.

Sex on College Campuses

The “realm of pure possibility” (Turner 1967: 95) among liminal college students is also evident in the role of sex and hook up culture in college courtship. Previous studies concerning courtship and romantic love have heavily associated love with sex. It is often argued that the primary motivation behind love is sex and reproduction, and social constraints in the past only accepted sex between two people in the context of romantic love and marriage (Buss 1988, Beigel 1951). However, all of the students in my sample except for one, starkly separate love from sex. Ally for example, quite plainly states,

“you can have sexual feelings and want to have sex with somebody but I feel like lust is only wanting that and nothing more” ... “love is wanting to be with that person even if the sex life isn’t wasn’t what you expected or wanted but it’s not what makes the relationship important; I mean it is an important part of the relationship, but it’s not everything in the relationship.”

Here Ally alludes to the role of sex in relationships. Sex is a form of intimacy in relationships, but it does not define the relationship as a romantically involved one. Significant about this though is the notion that a romantic relationship does involve sex, and a serious relationship lacking in sexual intimacy is considered a problem. Sex outside of a romantic relationship, however, is just that. To sum up what all UT students say about sex, I give a quote from Gabe, a heterosexual male of European and Indian descent: “you don’t have to be in love to have sex.” Physical intimacy is an innate human desire according to all interviewed subjects. In addition, liminality itself is associated with sexual experimentation especially in the context of coming-of-age rituals. It is no wonder then, why hook up culture is so prevalent, especially among a population of college students transitioning their way into the adult world.

Hook up culture has increasingly been the subject of study on college campuses. In this paper, hook up culture is defined as casual sex relationships without the definition of or the anticipation of a romantic relationship. Many studies such as that of England and Thomas (2006)

argue for the decline of ‘traditional dating’ and the rise of hook up culture. Traditional dating is typically defined as a man taking a woman out of the house, away from parental supervision and out into a public space in order to get to know her and pursue a romantic relationship. This is generally the ‘accepted’ way to enter relationships, and then this leads to a romantic relationship and sex. However, the prevalence of casual sex is not something that is a new trend. Casual sex has been around arguably since sex has been around. The ‘rise’ of hook up culture is merely the rise of social acceptance of casual sex especially given increasing sexual liberation movements (Hatfield and Rapson 2005). As for the decline of the ‘traditional date,’ that could be due to the rise in technology that allows people to meet each other in faster ways. People no longer need to go out on a ‘traditional’ date to get to know someone when they can do it through an app (Ansari and Klinenberg 2015). College campuses are especially prone to increased levels of hook up culture behavior given the liminal status of students and the environment of hundreds of liminal individuals put together in one place.

When asked “What does hook up culture mean to you and do you think it’s prevalent at UT?” Klay responded with:

“I think its prevalent on virtually every college campus that I’ve heard of, when you put a bunch of young fit people in like 2 square miles, that’s going to happen”... “by proximity almost”... “process of dating is like super accelerated because of the like access and like many more options”... “I don’t think there’s anything ethically or morally wrong with hookup culture”... “a minute little part of the process of [getting to know someone/dating] its accelerated when you’re in close proximity with a bunch of young people who are also single and all have tinder and have these shortcuts that help make that happen” ... “it’s a kind of a relationship where, hooking up with someone and never speaking to them again or hooking up with someone and staying friends with them, it is just a type of [relationship] when many short cuts exist and you have access and you’re in an environment like any college town where there’s a lot of eligible people then there’s a prevalence of hookups. I think it’s just byproduct of who’s here (young people), the technology we have; and so, the courtship environment, little parts of it have changed. It’s a valid thing”... “I’m not anti-hookup but I have also had a not great experience with that too, because of like the process of it just burning me out and it just wasn’t for me” ...

“at the onset I don’t pigeon hole the one thing [being romantically involved w someone or it being a lustuous one-time thing]—all I can say about it is that I either do want to pursue something more or I don’t.”

Klay’s initial statement that hook up culture is just bound to happen is a good representative of how most of the UT students felt about the prevalence of hook up culture at UT and other college campuses. Klay places the most emphasis on the close proximity of available partners and the role of technology in dating nowadays. Applications like Tinder allow people to have even more access to available partners at an accelerated rate (Ansari and Klinenberg 2015). For this reason, Klay suggests he does not put much thought into these interactions at the onset of them, it is after the initial interaction that he can decide if he wants to pursue a more romantically involved relationship or if it is just a hook up. He does not directly define what the interaction of hooking up is, but his anecdotes allude to people having casual sex relationships with others that is just that-- casual sex and nothing more. This ‘initial interaction’ varied though, as Klay explained that sometimes messaging on tinder might often lead nowhere. He gave me an anecdote about a time he discussed arranging a date with a girl who seemed pretty interested as well, but they never met up and stopped talking not long after. This indicates that it often takes meeting in person to actually decide what kind of relationship will pursue, but Tinder and similar apps make it easier to find people and at least start to get to know them. They are “short cuts” in the dating process as Klay refers to them, but they do not replace the process of getting to know someone, nor do they define whether an interaction will lead to casual sex, a date and future relationship, or nothing. Notable as well is the recurring theme of courtship as requiring work that Klay was just not willing to put in anymore, at least not through accelerated processes like Tinder. Klay also reminds us that there is nothing ethically or morally wrong with this kind of casual sex behavior, rather that it is inevitable.

Lily had a similar anecdote:

“Hook up culture to me, it’s usually seen in young people but it could be anyone. In the past it would be mostly like you have one romantic partner and one sexual partner, or, if you have more sexual partners keep it hush hush kind of thing. So, to me now anyone is really open with who they’ve been with and how many and no one is really ashamed, at least in the circles that I’ve been. And it can be very liberating for a lot of people, a lot of people are not into it at all, and its commoditized now we have a lot of apps for it, we have like a whole industry that boomed from that” ... “it has its pros and cons for sure, I just think you have to know what’s best for you” ... “I think you can still have romantic relationships even though you have hooked up a lot in the past, some people don’t believe that but I think that’s true” ... “its very subjective, if you are someone who’s tried hooking up and it’s like, it’s just not for them and they feel most comfortable being with especially someone they’re in love with or more comfortable with, each take on it is valid, I think it’s different for everyone” ... “there are times where you have very casual relationships just for fun you know, it’s like nice to have a mutual understanding of we know it’s going to be a short term thing so it like you know it’s fun”

Lily acknowledges the changing attitudes on hook up culture, as in the past it was associated with secrecy and shame and now it is more acceptable to be open about hooking up. She also places emphasis on the subjective nature of these behaviors because some people, including other students I interviewed, were not ‘into’ hooking up. For her personally, casual relationships could be ‘just for fun’ and these relationships could include going on dates as well as having casual sex with the same person but not defining a committed relationship and knowing it is short term. Thus, ‘hooking up’ does not always have to mean casual sex and nothing more. Often times it is accompanied with dating and equated with a way of getting to know someone beyond the arbitrary level. Whether that leads to a more emotionally involved long-term relationship is undefined. Thus, hook up culture should be conceptualized as an integrated part of the unstructured realm of courtship.

Belle reflects on a time that she engaged in hook up culture:

“I think it’s a behavior and it doesn’t have to be a part of love” ... “well historically like women would have sex with multiple men to ensure that their child is being taken care of because any man that has sex with a women takes care of the child whether they know

it's theirs or not because there were no paternity tests or anything. I think its survival strategy. But hook up culture, like at UT, I feel like people expect it. I mean my first frat party I hooked up with a football player and it was my first frat party ever at UT and I was like 'I'm going to hook up with somebody' which I don't know why I did that but it was a terrible experience it was awful, but I think it exists more now that people have slowly started to dissociate it with love, and it's okay. Like people get slut shamed and stuff like that but everybody does it, maybe not everybody but a lot of people."

Belle defines casual sex as merely a behavior that may or may not include feelings of love. Interesting as well is her connection of what she was learning about in her marriage and family class to human behaviors. Belle refers to the act of hooking up as a 'survival strategy,' referring especially to in the past. However, when she talks about the prevalence of hook up culture at UT, she recalls an unpleasant first hookup she had because this kind of behavior is 'expected' on a college campus. I think that the media plays a role in this, because often times the media portrays the active and mostly casual sex lives of young adults, at times even glamorizing this kind of behavior. Thus, there may be pressure felt by UT students to engage in hook up culture because they feel like it is expected of them. While hook ups can be enjoyable, there are a lot of cases where they were not enjoyable moments or where students felt regret or negative feelings afterwards, as in the case of Belle. In addition, like Lily, Belle mentions the shift in social acceptance of hook up culture. In the past, having sex was associated with love, or it was at least supposed to be saved for when you are in love. Belle claims that love and sex in college have become dissociated so that people can have casual sex without relating it to love, and that is acceptable.

One interview in particular stood out as presenting a more traditional view of hook up culture. Rose claims,

"I don't understand hook up culture whatsoever to be honest because for me like physicality and emotionality are very very deeply intertwined so I can't separate the two and I don't understand how people can. If they can like good for them, but I can see why its enticing because a lot of us in college are very busy and motivated with other things

there's too much to do. And often the people who are involved in hookup culture have kind of gone through some rougher relationships where they've learned how to detach themselves physically and emotionally as far as I've learned they've had a previous experience where they were able to detach emotion and physicality and that's why they can continue doing that, I've never had an experience like that so I can't separate them. Sometimes it's like a scarring experience or a tragic experience sometimes it's just something that they learn through a relationship and they're like well this works moving on. I think it's also its just easy right, because you get what you need in that moment in time, you don't have to maintain emotional ties you don't have to get involved, and with college culture already being so overwhelming it's just the easy way out."

Rose represents an outlier in the sample. She is the only student to outwardly say she could not engage in hook up culture because she needs be emotionally intimate with a person in order to be physically intimate with them, the two go hand in hand for her. She even associates the ability of others to separate emotional and physical involvement with a sort of traumatic experience that they have had. That she thinks she hasn't had that 'detachment' experience in her life that would allow her to separate emotional and physical intimacy suggests to me a sort of anxiety towards casual relationships. She is implying that if she were to engage in a casual sex encounter she would likely become emotionally involved, whereas her partner may not feel the same way. Her apparent 'inability' to separate emotional and physical intimacy is probably due to her more traditionalist cultural background. She mentions many times that in her Pakistani culture, as a woman she is taught not to give physical intimacy without being emotionally involved.

Rose also makes reference to her experience with peer groups and hook up culture, in conjunction with her cultural background, that shape her attitudes on love. When asked if she feels any internal or external pressures to think or act a certain way when it comes to romantic love she explained,

"I think I one hundred percent stop myself from physical things first just because I feel like the hook up culture is so prevalent that I'm never going to find someone who wants to stay with me long term if I give them physicality first. And I've been taught that with

my own culture in general, I'm not entirely against it but I preface it by not putting it into the equation and seeing if the person still sticks around kind of. But that's like a personal strategizing of filtering out the garbage that I don't want to deal with."

Rose thus further displays her anxieties in the arena of romantic love, and why she does not permit herself to have casual sex without being emotionally involved first. She is, however, very aware of how her Pakistani American cultural background has influenced her perspectives on love and her tendency to intertwine physical and emotional intimacy. Whereas her Pakistani culture provides her a more traditional script for romantic relationships, she is still able to comprehend why hook up culture is so appealing to college students. It's the 'easy' way of getting 'what you want' (physical pleasure) without having to bear the burden of emotional ties in an already overwhelming environment. Once again, we get the notion that ideal romantic relationships require a lot of time and energy. The demands of a college campus impede the ability to allocate adequate time and energy to strong emotional investments like romantic relationships. Rose is not alone in her anxieties in the search for romantic love. Other students including DJ and Theo expressed a hopeless attitude towards pursuing romantic relationships because of being too busy with pursuing their college careers as well as the tendency of a lot of college students to just be looking for a hook up and nothing more. However, given the realization of college students of their inability to form adequate emotional bonds that constitute their ideal love, it makes sense for students to pursue hook ups rather than relationships during college liminality.

The stigmas behind hook up culture mentioned by Lily and Rose are reflective of the perception of hooking up or casual sex as dangerous or dissolving to those entities maintaining structure (Turner 1967). Because in the past sex and love have been institutionalized in marriage as a structuring element of society, hook up culture is perceived as a threat to that institution.

These attitudes are emulated in such arguments that claim ‘hooking up’ is a new behavior that is replacing traditional dating. Rather, we should recognize that hooking up on college campuses is not much different than courtship behaviors already observed on campuses that can also be perceived as dangerous or dissolving to the ideal romantic love which legitimizes marriage. What’s more, hooking up is, in conjunction with courtship, the way that students are not only learning about each other but learning about themselves through intimacy. There are cases where the initial sexual desire evolves into a romantically involved relationship. Hooking up is even sometimes accompanied by going on dates and spending time together even though the relationship has still not been defined, or if it has been defined it is as something short term. While the ‘traditional date’ may be declining according to England and Thomas, it seems to me that they have not disappeared nor have they been replaced by the ‘hook up.’ Hook up culture is just another part of the unstructured “realm of pure possibility” (Turner 1967: 95) of courtship at UT that may or may not inquire traditional dates or emotional intimacy. Nevertheless, hooking up at UT is another activity through which students are continuously confronting structure with anti-structure and thus expressing their liminality.

Gendered Roles In Courtship

In traditional scripts of courtship, men are prescribed as ‘initiators’ and women as the gate keepers of sexual intimacy (Ehrhardt & Seal 2003). Men’s masculinity is legitimized by being sexually active and being able to provide resources for a woman. Whereas a woman’s femininity is confirmed by her being physically attractive to men (Wolkimir 2009). These roles are evident in studies of gender differences among dating rituals, as Jackson et al. noted that men are more likely than woman to enact behaviors like buying gifts, especially in more serious relationships. In addition, men are also more likely to place higher significance on sexual

intimacy than women in romantic relationships. (Jackson et al. 2011). According to Turner, “sex distinctions are important components of structural status” (1967: 96) and to Wolkimir gendered division of labor is the primary structuring institution in society. Men and women at UT have been socialized into performing their associated gender or gender roles. I sought out to see how gender roles are being reproduced among students at UT.

Gabe’s account illustrates the expectations of men in courtship while apprehending the superficial reality of attraction. Prior to going on a date, he describes a conversation he had with his father:

“my dad was like ‘do you want me to give you some tips—make sure you hold the door open, make sure you offer to pay,’ things like that, ‘make sure you’re polite.’ Even if they say no they want to pay, it’s still nice to pay anyway, even though it’s like not so trendy anymore, it’s still nice to pay. I guess even though I am aware that that is very gender normative, I still do that you know, I guess it’s sort of like engrained I guess I grew up thinking that’s what you’re supposed to do so I do it. I think for guys its more normal for them to take the initiative I guess.” ... “Stereotypically, I guess it’s like the [girls] respond to the guy. It sounds so shallow but I think obviously both people have to be ‘looking pretty.’ In different ways, I actually don’t like [makeup], like that’s not necessary. But I guess it’s a different dynamic now than when for example my parents were dating, like gender norms were very different then, I think it’s more of an equal kind of thing nowadays at least in my experience, but still like when I talk to my dad like engrained in me is ‘okay I’m supposed to do this’ and it’s almost like um yeah there is still some gender roles I guess. They are there but you don’t have to follow them because you know it’s really not ‘norms’ that much anymore.”

Gabe’s response is an intermediate one in that he grew up being told to do things like taking the initiative in courtship, paying for dates and opening doors, so these actions are engrained in him as the ‘right’ thing to do when courting a woman. On the other hand, he recognizes that these are indeed gender normative actions and that it is no longer the ‘norm’ so much as it was in the past. He mentions that of course the people should be ‘looking pretty’ and it is assumed a woman should especially be pretty looking. Gabe does not think being pretty looking is all that matters however, and heavy make up for him is certainly not necessary. He

outlines these expectations and considers how they can still be prevalent in courtship, but the norm today he proposes is more equal. UT students cannot ignore the existence of traditional gender roles in courtship, but strictly following these scripts on the UT campus is rather rare.

Rose's anecdote mirrors Gabe's as a recognition of traditional gender roles as not so much the norm anymore. She is significant however because she reflects on the internal struggles she faces with being exposed to traditional cultural scripts for engaging in courtship.

"Courtship, I constantly battle with this personally just because I think American and Pakistani culture both are very traditionalist in the sense that the dude has to come pick you up and like pay for the first dinner and stuff like that. Personally, those things are a huge cherry on top of course" ... "being in the context of, like, I also was kind of romantically involved with a German and their culture is very equalist, and so in our [American] culture we're almost always taught as women to not make the first move. The male is supposed to make the first move, but in German culture it's 100% equal, so if you like someone you have to make the first move, if you're going to dinner then like you either go half and half or you-- you know it's not uncomfortable for you to pay for the first date. I've only been on one official date and I paid for the date and I felt a little bit uncomfortable about it even though I think it doesn't matter. To be honest with you in the greater context of things I don't care, and I think that guys take girls out all the time why can't a woman take a man out? But when I apply it to myself I still get that sense of uncomfortability [sic] because of my cultural background" ... "I'm not a materialistic person in the first place, but I do know like in Pakistani culture specifically, it would be looked very down upon if the man didn't pay for the first date, if he wasn't bringing her gifts, that's like a huge component of that culture. I think in American culture it's not that case anymore, especially university love. University love is very different because you're both broke, really, and so like yes for some people because of their cultural background it would be looked down upon if the guy didn't pay, but I think to the very average basic white person I don't think that would make a difference-- that's just my assumption." ... "Personally, I think that maybe I still expect the person to pay on the first date, but then after that I don't expect anything. I think the traditionalist gesture is nice, I wouldn't discount the person if they didn't, but it's a nice gesture."

Rose continuously shows sophisticated analysis of her cultural background in contributing to her values in courtship. She is inclined to feel uncomfortable if a man does not fulfill at least some of the traditional gender roles such as paying for a date or providing and caring for her. She realizes though that this is most likely because in her Pakistani culture it would be looked down upon if the man did not do these things. Contrarily, she has been exposed

to many cultures in her life, and she gave me several anecdotes of the kinds of varying gender roles she has encountered in relationships with men of different cultural backgrounds. Thus, she has learned to be less concerned with a man always paying for dates or fulfilling an initiative role, especially as the relationship moves on. At the onset of the relationship though, she does still expect the man to assume this role in the initial interaction or date. This is primarily due to the fact that she was groomed to not really make the first move, as most women her age were in American culture she claims. There is a connotation that her views have been evolving though, as she ponders why should it be looked down upon if a woman were to take a man out if men take women out all the time. Here we see Rose's personal "pitch of self-consciousness" in her confrontation of structure against anti-structure (Turner 1974: 255). She has been consistently socially engrained into the structure of her cultures. During this liminal period at UT she begins to challenge those structural roles through egalitarian courtship practices, and she is not the only one.

Lily, for example, expresses a progressively more initiative role in the courtship process.

"There are [gender roles] like generally the guy has to pay, I don't ever expect that of a guy. You kind of get those cues when you're about to pay [on a date] and you're like you know 'who's gonna do it,' half the time we end up splitting it even on the first date like I don't really care. I know a lot of women get bothered by that which I think is like weird" ... "but if the guy would offer to pay for my stuff then I'd be like sure I like free stuff you know. And he's doing it out of politeness and good intention so of course you know I would try to return the favor in the future. So, I understand that's like a polite gentlemanly thing and I appreciate that but if he doesn't do that I'm also okay with that" ... "I have been in other like courtships," ... "for example I was in Miami in summer and I went on a date with this guy" ... "I would be like oh I can take this one and he's like nah, but at the same time I knew he had a lot of money like through his family and that was fine so it was just like sure, if he insists" ... "in the case of my ex he didn't have a lot of money so in a way I guess he was glad that I never like expected that of him." ... "Deciding the dates and like initiating stuff, in the past I was always the one that had the lack of initiative and was like yeah, sure he's the one that's reaching out I'll just play along. Now I think I'm more comfortable with like deciding where and when [to meet]." ... "It's just like a natural thing now that's just like, if I like someone I'm not going to

wait around for him.” ... “If I’m already attracted to someone and I think if he shows initiative it would make me feel really good because I’m like okay yes now I know [he’s interested too]” ... “but like the standard is that usually guys are the ones that have to show the initiative. So if I’m going under that assumption, and then even though he is into me he doesn’t show initiative, and I’m into him, I would think like my chances with him are slim because [he hasn’t initiated] but in terms of [him initiating] making him more attractive to me I don’t think that has a big role in that” ... “It is important for a [man to be able to provide of you]. It is important under the context that I am also trying to provide to both of us. I don’t want to date a loser no one wants to date a loser I want to date someone who’s like hard working and passionate and that’s like natural to want to take care of your partner. If he wants to be the sole provider, I’m not bothered by that either because I’m going to do what I want to do anyway, so I think its kind of sweet because it shows that they care and they want the best for you”

Lily represents what to me is the average modern female student at UT when it comes to romantic love and courtship. One who is able to identify the gender roles in courtship and is more or less comfortable with a guy enacting them, while simultaneously being comfortable with challenging them. Lily implies she would not stop a man from playing his role, but it does not matter to her whether a man chooses to fulfill the traditional masculine role or not for her to be attracted to him or romantically involved with him. The traditional gestures are nice because in the minds of UT students these are a man’s way of showing he cares and wants to provide, but as Rose raises and Lily suggests, it is natural for a woman to want to provide for her partner as well. Lily even shows joy in taking up a more initiative role in courtship as she explains being more comfortable with picking date time and places. Sometimes it is important for a woman to initiate in cases where a man who is interested is not willing to initiate. Lily asserts she is not going to wait around for someone who shows no interest. Reciprocation has been a key recurring theme in love and courtship for UT students. For instance, Lily claims that it is important for a man to want to provide in the relationship, in the context of the woman providing to the relationship as well. Should he choose to be sole provider is up to him, she will continue to provide according to her own values. Lily shows more independence of her partner as far as financial stability goes,

and more egalitarian principles of effort and action between the man and woman in the courtship process.

Some young women at UT are showing even more initiative, thus directly contradicting the ideal of the “reluctant woman.” Belle for example, exudes confidence in initiating first contact between her and her now long-term boyfriend.

“I support and I don’t support like certain like certain gender roles in courtship, I definitely like came to him first and gave him my phone number and was like let’s hang out. But it’s important that anytime that there’s an attempt at a courtship or whatever, I expect it to be reciprocated, like if I give you my number at least call me”

This anecdote directly debunks the myth of the reluctant woman. It is not the woman responding to the actions of the man, rather, Belle makes the first move and expects him to respond to her. Lily expresses desire for a man to want to provide for the family, but elevates herself to the role of provider as well. It is evident that women in my sample are more comfortable with eluding traditional gender roles than men are. For example, the women in my sample do not necessarily find it more attractive if a man can provide resources for them because now women have more freedom to acquire resources themselves, while men still feel inclined to be the provider and enact that role despite knowing it is ‘just a norm.’ Regardless of the effects of socialization norms on student behavior, “since sex distinctions are important components of structural status, in a structureless realm, they do not apply” (Turner 1967: 96). This would explain why gender roles on UT campus are not followed so rigorously in courtship. In addition, that students are defying such performances of gendered roles and their recognition that these roles are social constructs demonstrates their analysis of their culture and condition of reflection. Turner has also claimed that “the analysis of culture into factors and their free recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird, that is most characteristic of liminality” (1974:255). Thus, the ability of students to identify gendered roles as structuring entities of

society and then blur those performances across genders or participate in more egalitarian-patterned roles emulates their liminal character.

Conclusions: How Liminal is College?

As part of my concluding comments, I include a quote by my respondent Gabe that embodied to me the students' consciousness of the liminal phase in college in regard to romantic love and courtship. He claims that this unstructured realm of pure possibility is apparent

“because it’s like the age where no one is married and we’re all like sexually available, like we could be married but it’s like that age where there’s a lot of people who are single, mixing, and on a college campus and they’re trying to like explore this part or side of life I guess.”

Here Gabe has emphasized the ambiguous status of students on a college campus. They ‘could be married’ or committed, but most choose not to be since they evidently lack the time and emotional energy to put towards an ideal romantic relationship. In addition, students are in a phase of exploring and learning about their sexualities. That is significantly easier when surrounded by other sexually available, liminal individuals all congregated at one college campus.

To further emphasize the liminality of students at UT, I have analyzed how they define romantic love in comparison with how they conceptualize courtship on the college campus. While students had different experiences with love, they all had a generalized ideal romantic love that they associate with a period after college. The ideal love was most notably characterized by a reciprocation of invested time and energy into the relationship, which was seemingly inconceivable during college for the students. Rose even made a claim that men “at this age” were “not mature enough” to want to pursue the ideal romantic relationship. Referring back to her opening quotation, many students related to the idea that they did not know what was

going to become of them after the ‘transitional’ or liminal period. The students are self-conscious in that they know they are in a transitional period, which is why they behave in the unstructured ways they do in courtship. Courtship on the UT college campus is not enacted with the inherent intention of reconciling the ideal romantic love; rather it is about getting to know other people, having fun, and exploring and learning how the ideal romantic relationship should work. It is through this college campus courtship that students are both dissolving and reflecting on structural assertions of society such as gendered roles and marriage for love. Students perform egalitarian gendered roles and engage in courtship behaviors that threaten the institution of marriage such as hook up culture because it is convenient for them while in the liminal period in which they lack time and energy for the ideal romantic love. Once they have left the liminal phase, students will be adults that are both building careers and seeking out the ideal romantic love that will ultimately structure them into marriage and family units.

Obviously, there is little structure to dating in college as a liminal space, but liminality in itself does have its limits. We must remember that “most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our society” (Turner 1967:94). By definition liminal individuals do not fit within the classifications of society; however, these classifications do still exist and have structural impacts. The UT students, as liminal individuals, can only act within the limits of the classifications they know. Thus, it is risky to call college courtship a “realm of pure possibility” when it is the blurring of categories that are already in existence in the minds of students. On the other hand, the “realm of pure possibility” exists for me in the “novel configurations” (Turner 1967:95) that have arisen from college courtship. For example, the rise in prevalence and significance of the use of dating apps and online interaction as part of getting

to know someone. There is vast possibility in the ways of getting to know others that contributes to the anti-structure of college courtship.

Now the ambiguity lies in the definition of courtship. UT students have continuously defined it as “getting to know someone,” but if there are a lot of ways of doing this including through apps and hooking up before dating, can this still be defined as courtship? I think the word courtship and what is included in its definition is subject to change over time. There is traditional courtship which entails the kind of strict gendered roles of a man ‘courting’ a woman that we associate with older periods in time. The courtship students are defining is one that relates to their state or what is going on today. We could give the two different definitions, but all in all they both imply an interest in another person and trying to display that interest. The difference is in the mechanisms by which that courtship is done, not necessarily the meaning of said courtship. However, courtship in the liminal phase is unstructured because of the intents behind the courtship. Liminal courtship is about exploration, whereas in a non-liminal space courtship is more oriented towards finding a marriage.

It is clear that college and the attitudes of romantic love of students in college are different today than what they used to be. College for a woman used to be about finding a good husband. As the popular phrase goes, men go to college to get their BA, women go to college to get their MRS. It seems that now, both men and women are so career oriented that finding the ideal love in college is inconceivable. It can be said that college is ostensibly more liminal now than it was in the past. There could be many causal mechanisms behind this. Of course, there is a lot of research to be done here, but I believe the changing status of women in US society, sexual liberation movements, and the socioeconomic climate of today could be the contributing factors. Women today are less in need of a husband for economic solidarity as more opportunities have

opened up for women in education and the workforce. At the same time, the cost of living has increased and it has become progressively more difficult for millennials to secure the career of their choice without years of education and experience. That could be why students, increasingly women, are so career oriented during college and less concerned with the ideal romantic love. It is now education and career experience that contributes more to economic success than finding the right husband or wife to share assets with. Finding the right romantic partner in life is, for UT students now, something that can wait for proper time and energy allocation that is presently going towards career success in the liminal period. The time and energy they allow for endeavors in love and courtship reflects their attitudes of courtship for exploration.

The pinnacle of liminality is that it throws its subjects out into the realm of possibility for them to return back to the structured realm in a new state. If college is as liminal as I have suggested then the students I have interviewed would eventually, when out of the liminal period, be in a new state of love and courtship. I have claimed that the ideal love students conceive as happening at some point after college is that new state. The intentions of courtship that are for marriage and building a family, rather than for exploration, are reflective of the newfound state students will reach after the liminal period. However, the question becomes: will the students also return to the structured gender roles that have been blurred in the liminal period? A report done by Louise Story for The New York Times in 2005 that included interviews with 138 freshman and senior women at Yale University suggested that 60 percent of these women planned to either stop working entirely or at least cut back on working when they had children. This report implies that women in college have previously been career oriented and then have fallen back into the traditional role of being a stay-at-home mother while their husbands continue to work. It would be interesting to conduct further study into trends like this and the causes

behind them. Pertaining to my study specifically, it would be helpful to be able to follow my subjects as they complete their paths out of the liminal period and see if they follow the same trend of falling back into traditional roles. If the subjects do not follow this trend and they remain egalitarian in their pursuits of courtship, marriage, and family building, I think it is worth digging into the effects of social movements today on men and women and their attitudes towards traditional gender roles.

There were some other comments made by my respondents that urged me to ponder some questions for future research. For example, DJ and Theo expressed to me some frustrations they had with engaging in courtship in the queer community. I wonder then, how different courtship may look in the queer community compared to heterosexual courtship. I would be interested to know how (or if) traditional heteronormative gender roles are being reproduced in the queer community. Recall that DJ's attitude towards romantic love was one of the most traditional and romanticized. It is interesting that the views of a gay man are closest to a conservative Pakistani woman's. His views reflect romantic love in a heteronormative and traditional sense when it comes to marriage especially, which is probably heavily influenced by his traditional upbringing. He did mention to me that he was very religious and grew up in a conservative household. So, it would be worth researching not only how heteronormativity may be being reproduced, but also how social upbringing contributes to this as well. In addition, I am curious to know if the tendency of women in my sample to be more receptive to ambiguous gender roles than men is reflected in populations outside of my sample, and if so what is the cause of this? The research that can be done on romantic love is limitless, as love and courtship manifest in different ways across varying realms and populations throughout time and space.

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